



A Long Way to Go: An Analysis of the Proposed Engagement of Men and Boys in 13 Country Implementation and Action Plans*

Christopher Hook, Karen Hardee, Tim Shand, and Margaret E. Greene

Introduction

The world has set ambitious goals related to reproductive health and family planning, including to reach an additional 120 million women and girls with contraception by 2020 and achieve universal access to reproductive health and family planning by 2030. The focus of these goals is women and girls, yet realizing these ambitions requires including men. Increasing male engagement in an explicitly gender-transformative way is central to improving the health and well-being of women and men and to achieving global goals for family planning and reproductive health.

Following the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, countries were encouraged to make policy, programmatic, and financial commitments to improve family planning uptake. In 2017, these governments had the opportunity to renew their commitments, with additional countries joining the Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) partnership. To date, 47 countries have made commitments, for which they were encouraged to develop costed implementation plans (CIPs) and action plans to help them achieve their family planning goals. A comprehensive CIP can address and budget for all thematic areas of a family planning program. Reviewing the text of these strategies thus provides a snapshot of the ways in which countries anticipate reaching their FP2020 goals and, therefore, the extent to which they see increasing the engagement of men as family planning users, partners, and activists as an important aspect of programming.

Methodology

Between June 2018 and March 2019, the review team analyzed final strategies related to achieving each country's FP2020 commitments. The assessed documents included commitments made at the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning and/or at the 2017 Family Planning Summit; CIPs, the primary focus of this analysis; annual country action plans; and self-reporting questionnaires submitted to FP2020 on intermediate progress made towards achieving goals. To retain a focus on FP2020, other national strategies and plans (such as national reproductive health strategies) were not included in the analysis. The 13 countries and provinces in this analysis were selected for review because they had been given priority by key donors in the international sexual and reproductive health field in the previous ten years.**

* The full report: Hook, C., Hardee, K., Shand, T., & Greene, M. E. (2019). *A long way to go: An analysis of the proposed engagement of men and boys in 13 country implementation and action plans*. Washington, DC: Promundo.

** Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria-National, Nigeria-Gombe State, Nigeria-Kaduna State, Nigeria-Lagos State, Pakistan-Balochistan Province, Pakistan-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan-Punjab Province, Pakistan-Sindh Province, Senegal

For this analysis, male engagement was defined as *the intentional inclusion in and participation of men and boys in family planning programs as supportive partners, contraceptive users, and agents of change, with an emphasis on addressing gender norms and power differentials throughout the life cycle*. Each CIP was reviewed looking at the extent to which it addressed this definition, in domains including policy and advocacy, financing and governance, demand generation, and service delivery. Two additional cross-cutting domains were also assessed: gender norms and male family planning methods. Then, the activities proposed within each domain were rated by red, yellow, or green lights; “green light” was reserved for detailed gender-responsive or gender-transformative proposals for engaging men and boys within the priority areas.

Findings

Current family planning CIPs and related strategic plans have an insufficient focus on male engagement and addressing gender norms. Of the 13 FP2020 country or province plans analyzed in this document, none had robust male engagement programs. Across the plans, the strongest aspects were those that engaged men as advocates for women’s access to and use of family planning services and that improved knowledge and attitudes related to contraception and reproduction. The weakest aspects were engaging men as users of sexual and reproductive health services and tackling underlying gender norms that prevent men, women, and children from accessing the health services they need.

Other findings included:

- No national or sub-national strategy proposed improvements to the policy environment to strengthen support for male engagement.
- Of the programs engaging men as advocates, only three (Ethiopia, and Pakistan’s Punjab and Sindh provinces) planned to engage existing or new cadres of men to speak to other men about family planning. These approaches are important, as they take the burden off of female community health workers and activists, speak to the experiences of men, and contribute to shifting the norm that such topics are “women’s issues.”
- The School for Husbands (l’École des Maris) approach, developed by the United Nations Population Fund, was employed in Ethiopia, Niger, and Senegal, though it has not been independently evaluated.
- Youth-friendly services were the most commonly mentioned male engagement intervention, yet no program stated that it would disaggregate outcomes by gender.
- No country had made specific commitments to increasing the uptake of vasectomy and condoms, methods used by men. Fertility awareness-based methods, considered male-cooperative methods, were reflected in the CIPs of Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Next Steps

Analyzing male engagement in family planning programming within these national and provincial plans and strategies affords an opportunity to provide recommendations for strengthening male engagement.

Achieving 120 million new contraceptive users – and full gender equality – needs men not in charge of women’s reproductive decisions, but as full, equitable, caring human beings and partners, invested in their own health and supportive of women’s autonomy. As we move past 2020 to 2030, an assessment of the global development landscape calls for shifting community norms and changing institutions so that men and boys contribute more fully to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Interested in discussing partnerships to advance male engagement in contraceptive use as an essential element of gender-equitable sexual and reproductive health and rights? Write us at m.green@promundoglobal.org.